TECHNICAL WRITING REVIEW

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TECHNICAL WRITING REVIEW

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How to Select a Technical Writer

By
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President
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Can we prepare a specification for a technical writer? This is a good question, which frankly neither I nor anyone else can answer with finality. There have been a few "educated guesses" made. (See Richard Schultz, T.W.E. Journal, Spring 1956 and also a discussion at the February 1957 meeting of the Boston Chapter, S.T.W.) But I have not yet seen any report of a careful, objective study based upon experimental data. This will come, (already I have had volunteers for participation in such a research) but in the meantime, let me, too, make an "educated guess."

When selecting a tech writer I look for the following:

1. Intellectual ability in four categories:
   a. general verbal comprehension
   b. basic scientific understanding
   c. ability to reason inductively
   d. ability to reason deductively
2. Perceptual ability — the ability to see and feel, and to interpret quickly and accurately what one has seen and felt.
3. A diversified interest pattern which includes:
   a. a profound interest in things — what they are for, how they work.
   b. an equally profound interest in teaching — which, of necessity, must include an interest in verbal communication, both oral and written.
4. A personality pattern that enables the applicant to get along well with people at all vocational levels and activities, to stimulate them to provide needed data, and then to work by his lonesome to produce his literature. Perhaps I can sum this up by calling him (the ideal) a self-confident, gregarious ambivert with some of the qualities of a hermit.
5. A diversified background which might include general engineering, maintenance, etc. either vocationally or avocationally.
6. Basic ability to write. This latter I have generally tested subjectively by asking the applicant to write me a letter in which he details why he should have the job.

WHAT IS A TECH WRITER?

Fundamentally, the Tech Writer is a teacher — a teacher who works under a severe handicap — he never sees his pupils. He must communicate his knowledge, and stimulate his pupils verbally (in writing only) and pictorially. Therefore, the Tech Writer must expound, describe in detail, explain, interpret, and stimulate his pupils so that they can (and will desire to) read and see, and understand without the opportunity of asking questions.

The Tech Writer has both an economic and a functional reason for existence. Economically, a gadget is good only as it functions to the satisfaction of the owner — not the maker. The functioning of the gadget depends upon its installation, adjustment, operation, and maintenance. The how and why of these may be known generally by the purchaser, but rarely specifically — here is the need for technical literature and the Tech Writer.

Again economically, the engineer (or scientist) is too much engrossed in research, development and design — and is too valuable in those activities — to be willing to spend the time needed to prepare a suitable instruction book.

Functionally, the engineer or scientist who has the patience and the ability to write so that others can "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" is a rare one indeed. To him, the gadget (if an instruction book is needed) or the idea (if a journal article is wanted) is simple. Why waste time on details? But the competent writer, who has to learn step by step, recognizes the need for an orderly exposition of the subject; *he* is the learner and can "talk" to other learners with effect.

The Tech Writer uses three kits of tools — the device or concept about which he writes, a background of knowledge (not to be confused with electronic "noise"), and the techniques of communication.

The Tech Writer must know and understand the device or concept that is his subject matter. In some respects he must know and understand it as well as the engineer, or else his exposition will be weak and misleading. That is to say, he must know and understand the specific scientific and engineering principles in-

volved and be able to interpret them to the relative layman.

The Tech Writer focusses on each problem all of his background of knowledge, however acquired. We'll discuss this in greater detail later, but here let me catalog the salient elements of this background. These include technical and scientific understanding; specific technical knowledge if available; some knowledge of the techniques of installation, adjustment, operation and maintenance, (if an instruction book is being written); and a knowledge of people, including their motivations, ways of learning, and their language and reading abilities.

Finally, the Tech Writer uses the techniques of communication including both the preparation and the production of verbal and pictorial media.

CURRENT IDEAS ABOUT TECH WRITERS

Should you ask a dozen qualified supervisors and/or employment people about the characteristics of a competent (potentially or active) technical writer, you would be likely to get a dozen different analyses with perhaps a central core of commonality.

Many demand engineers first, coupled with a potential or active ability to write — whatever that may be. Others reverse the field — writers with ability to understand technological processes.

Most people demand (or try to demand) experience even though we all know that mere time serving does not signify proficiency.

The fact remains that we *know* little or nothing about the characteristics of a potentially proficient technical writer. Many people are unaware of or ignore the personality and interest patterns that will make or break the writer. Many look for a composite of qualifications rather than basic characteristics which, when synthesized spell "writer."

Above all, we have, as yet, no way of knowing "how much" of each characteristic a technical writer must have, even though we may be dimly aware that too much may be as bad as too little.

SOME GUESSED—AT CRITERIA

Now let me toss in a few ideas of my own. These will be to some extent "educated guesses" because of a background of interest and activity in selection techniques. Many will be accepted without question, because they seem to be obvious. Others may be debatable — and I will welcome your ideas.

Let us divide the field of inquiry into five closely interrelated categories: intellect, perception, interests, personality, and background.

INTELLECT

Let us consider five elements of intellectual ability: verbal, scientific, ideational, inductive reasoning, and deductive reasoning.

Verbal ability includes both an extensive vocabulary and an ability to understand and write manuscript. The vocabulary is needed so that the writer can understand the technical terminology and jargon in which information is given to him, and then interpret it into language acceptable to his readers.

Scientific understanding — as distinguished from technical knowledge — is, in my opinion, a must. Without it, a Tech Writer would be unable to analyze even the simplest gadget. A person can have this understanding without any specific technical knowledge of his subject matter; and then, by questioning and study, can develop a knowledge adequate for his purposes.

Ideational ability — or ability to think in abstract and generalized terms — could be (I believe it is) a very important ability. Perhaps we do not need (as Sherlock Holmes once declared) to visualize a Niagara Falls from a drop of water — but the ability certainly can help. A Tech Writer may have to prepare an extensive manual without ever seeing the gadget itself. He certainly will have to use drawings and diagrams and visualize their relation to the gadget. Reports and technical papers often are replete with generalizations.

The place of both inductive and deductive reasoning ability is fairly obvious. The Tech Writer needs both to a high degree if he is to study and learn his subject matter.

These five elements enter into what is commonly termed intellectual ability or general intelligence with a scientific slant, and I emphasize the word *general*. A word of caution. In this case "more" is not necessarily better than less. A person on the genius level of intelligence would probably be lost as a Tech Writer because his basic ability would be underutilized. Above average — YES. Too much above average — NO.

PERCEPTION

Perception, which is partly acquired habit, partly sensory ability, and partly intellectual, is not too commonly recognized as being important. Yet it enters profoundly into the productiveness of a Tech Writer. Diagnostic physicians have this ability to a high degree. They have so little time in which to collect data, and so much to collect. Perception forms the basis for subsequent analysis and synthesis. A Tech Writer has to make each minute of his time with a gadget count. Often, there is no return visit.

INTERESTS

I can visualize four major fields of interest that identify a Tech Writer — an interest in writing per se, and an interest in gadgets and technical processes, an interest in people, and in teaching.

The first is obvious. To one not interested, writing is a very tedious and boring task. If a person is interested, he is ready to do a tremendous amount of research and study to produce — time-wise — a relatively small amount of manuscript.

An interest in gadgets and technical processes is, too, perhaps obvious. But the interest should be extensive — almost as extensive as that of the budding engineer or scientist.

The Tech Writer needs to be profoundly interested in the what, why, when, where, how, and by whom of his subject. Unless he has this interest he is not going to direct his intellectual abilities effectively. Kipling had some words on this score. "I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew); — — — ".

An interest in people, if not a must, is nevertheless highly important. After all, a Tech Writer is writing to and for people. Unless he understands their motivations, their ways of learning and their objectives he may be writing words, but probably they will be misdirected words.

Moreover, the Tech Writer's interest should extend to people as individuals and specific groups. The installer, the operator, the maintenance man, the engineer, and the scientist all differ in their relative levels of knowledge, understanding, skill, thinking processes and motivations.

Interest in people should lead to the impelling desire to teach. Perhaps some do and those who can't do, teach. But teaching is a creative job, and a truly competent Tech Writer *must* be a competent teacher.

PERSONALITY

Personality patterns or structures are defined in as many ways as there are psychologists who have studied them. But let us confine ourselves to lay terminology, regardless of overlapping meanings, and state them in no particular order of relative importance.

a. Patience. Writing is a tedious task. It means building up, tearing down, and rebuilding, sometimes ad nauseum.

b. Thoroughness is closely allied with patience. The Tech Writer must be thorough if he is to present the story completely as needed.

c. Perseverence is another must. The writer rarely has facts placed before him in orderly array. He must screen, sift, organize and keep at it until he has the "story straight."

d. Tempering the foregoing, judgment will enable the writer to say to himself, "Thus far should I go. This much should I present. More would confuse. Less would present a wrong picture."

e. Let's look at the personality pattern from another angle. The writer must work with, learn from, and earn the respect of people from whom he gathers his information. Often, little or nothing has been written about his subject. More frequently, what has been written has been specialized or fragmentary. The writer must gather information from all sources, exhausting the available literature and drawings first so as to be able to ask the right questions. But finally he must go to people and elicit the needed information in as painless a fashion as possible.

f. Still another part of the personality pattern is acceptance, intelligent and graceful acceptance, of criticism. After all, other people have ideas — some good, some bad — but still they like their ideas. And if the writer listens he may learn something.

g. Closely allied is an ability of auto-criticism. The honest writer is rarely satisfied with what he has written, though as a practical matter he may have to stop refining and publish what he has written, "as is."

h. We could continue this cataloguing of personality characteristics. We could name versatility, ingenuity, imagination, empathy. Perhaps you will carry on. I hope so. But enough has been said to indicate both the importance and the complexity of the writer's personality.

BACKGROUND

In contrast to the previously mentioned qualifications, background is acquired. In the absence of other established criteria, many publications managers will place their major reliance upon background. At least it is objective. But here is my guess:

First, I look for a person who is a technologist at heart. He may have graduated as an engineer or scientist, or he may have been a hobbyist. Often the latter is more versatile. But I prefer the general technologist to the specialized person. The writer has to change his subject matter so often.

Next, I would like a person with some experience with the operation and maintenance of gadgets.

Sales or purchasing experience could be of real value.

In short, I would not choose or look for a high-powered engineer or scientist. He is vitally needed elsewhere, and in all probability he would be bored to tears at the very thought of writing. I DO want the person — man or woman — who interested in gadgets and technical concepts, who may have taken them apart and put them together again, — who reads lay and professional technical literature with equal enjoyment, and who is not afraid to tackle any technical topic. Libraries and old literature are generally available.

HOW MUCH OF EACH CHARACTERISTIC IS NEEDED?

Frankly, I do not know, even though I can hazard a guess. My guess would be that, excepting vocabulary which should be very extensive, more than average, but not too much more, would be desirable. Also, I suggest that a diversity of interests will help a Tech Writer to adapt himself to a variety of subjects without becoming unhappy.

MEASUREMENT OF APTITUDE

Can we measure an aptitude for technical writing? I believe we can, provided we undertake the needed research.

Would this research be worthwhile? It would take a substantial amount of time and money — mostly time. But if it would reduce the waste of time and money in selecting and training misfits, would reduce the frustrations caused by inevitable failure, it would

be worthwhile. Also, better selection procedures could improve the quality and reduce the cost of producing technical literature.

What would the research involve? Two time-consuming though simply stated steps:

a. The development of objective means for evaluating proficiency in the art of technical writing.
b. The investigation of various selection media, including personal history blanks, tests and measures, and work samples.

Such research is being initiated in the Boston Chapter.

SUMMARY

A Tech Writer functionally is a teacher.

He must study equipment and concepts from the point of view of his pupils (whom he never sees).

He must expound, using all media of communication.

He must have intelligence — verbal, scientific, and inductive and deductive reasoning ability.

He must have keen and quick perception.

He must be interested in writing, things, people, and teaching.

He must have a personality that enables him to get along with people, to glean information from them, and to produce an output useful for his "pupils."

A diverse technical background is possibly more important than a narrow background.

Let's make a real study of this. A start is being made.

EDUCATION FOR THE TECHNICAL WRITER

By

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Chairman, Education Committee,

Boston Chapter STW

The Education Committee of the Boston Chapter has been making a survey among New England colleges and universities to learn of the opportunities for training in technical writing. This information will be made available in its final report so that persons who wish to pursue academic work in technical writing will know where to go.

It is not expected that the report will reveal many startling developments or sweeping trends toward more educational opportunities. The day for the commonly accepted degree in technical writing is probably not immediately at hand.

Two schools will no doubt come in for special mention in the report. Tufts University, starting with a one month credit course in the summer of 1956, is working toward a more elaborate program which, it is hoped, eventually will lead to a four year degree. While plans for the full degree curriculum are developing, evening courses in technical writing are being given. In the summer of 1957 a two-week all day seminar will be offered.

Simmons College for women is also offering a four year degree curriculum. This program seems to have a good balance of science, journalism, English and graphic arts. It will be watched with much interest, for it seems to offer one of the promising opportunities women are looking for to be active in science and technology.

Representatives of other schools have talked with members of the Education Committee about the content and objectives of technical writing courses. Since their plans are not yet formulated it is not the time to discuss them. The kind of questions educators are asking can be answered best by practicing technical writers.

One question asks whether the technical writing curriculum should not consist simply in adding writing courses to the training of engineers. In this viewpoint it does not seem reasonable or possible to use the reporter's method in writing and publishing technical material. The WALL STREET JOURNAL carried a feature news story about the November technical writers convention in which much point was made of the difficulty industry has in obtaining engineering writers. Judging from the several letters published in their reader column, the engineering writer angle caused a flurry of dissent.

What do the practicing technical writers in general feel about it? Is the reporter's method practical and sound? Or should editing and publishing be the technical writer's primary method? If educators can get pragmatic answers they will be better able to determine their curriculum content.

Educators themselves may run into a problem with accrediting agencies in getting recognition for technical writing degrees. Their problem will be less serious if technical writers will work with all concerned in establishing the professionalism of their work.

the engineering angle caused a flurry of dissent.

The Technical Writer in Advertising*

By George F. MacKenzie, Member STW
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A continuing growth in technical industry has led to the birth of technical writing as an established profession. This same industrial growth has produced serious problems in clear concise communications for technical manufacturers. Perhaps the most graphic evidence of this rising technological demand is the almost frantic efforts of industrial management to recruit more and more engineering personnel.

As we know, this growing technology has made increasingly difficult a simple liaison between the manufacturer and the consumer of his products. Technical advertising is one of the areas hardest hit by a lack of common language between a manufacturer of technical products and the vehicles by which his sales message is carried.

The normal agencies through which the advertising message is prepared and disseminated are; the advertising agency, publicity and public relations counsel, marketing counsel, industrial design consultant, and the manufacturer's sales force.

Currently, with but few exceptions, the backgrounds of the personnel of these various service agencies are far from technical in nature. It quickly becomes evident that many problems of "language barrier" can arise when these agencies are turned to for counsel on technical and industrial product marketing.

In today's technical marketing picture, the technical writer and editor can overcome this serious lack of clear understanding and liaison. The advertising functions which are currently in need of technical writing ability are extremely broad and varied:

A. TECHNICAL MARKETING RESEARCH
   1. Preparation of survey reports couched in terms meaningful to engineering management and supervisors.
   2. Preparation of various types of written survey material in terms that will accurately penetrate to the roots of a technical marketing problem.

B. TECHNICAL PUBLICITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS
   1. Preparation of new product publicity.
   2. Writing feature articles for the trade press, manufacturers association publications and professional society journals.
   3. Preparation of publicity packets and associated literature for press shows, trade shows, manufacturers association conferences and professional society meetings.

C. TECHNICAL PRODUCT DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT
   1. Progress reporting in design research, which can make or break budget requests for research and development funds.
   2. Interpretive presentation of meaningful data to non-engineering management planning groups.

D. TECHNICAL SALES PROMOTION AND INSTRUCTIONAL LITERATURE
   1. Coordination with engineering personnel in data gathering phases.
   2. Interpretation of engineering terms and new features into sales message.
   3. Coordination of sales message and themes between management, engineering and sales.
   4. Liaison reporting between engineering and product consumer through survey and personal interview.

E. ADVERTISING MANAGEMENT
   1. Report and proposal preparation, providing clear communications between technical and non-technical personnel.

Photo by Fabian Bachrach

* *A talk presented to the Boston Chapter, Society of Technical Writers, November 9, 1956.*

F. TECHNICAL SALES PROMOTION

1. Preparation of texts for various levels of technical presentation:
   a. Industrial film scripts
   b. Sales training texts and aids
   c. Institutional texts
   d. House organs

This wide field of activities needs the experience and creative ability of the technical writer, and offers him a bright future.

The structure within an advertising agency provides a considerably better ladder of advancement and remuneration for the technical copy writer and editor. The normal functions of the writer in an agency lead to a program of self-education through widely varied experience. The following list is comprised of most of the areas within which the technical writer in advertising would perform:

Devising themes for advertising copy
Writing copy for ads
Analyzing research data
Contact work with artists
Making rough sketches for artists
Direct contact with clients
Direct contact with consumers
Planning over-all campaigns
Planning special promotions

These activities tend to instill and enhance broadly diversified talents in the writer, which will prepare him for a chance to advance to copy chief or possibly to an agency Vice-President in charge of copy.

For a technical writer in industry, opportunities for advancement seem more limited than in the technical advertising field. The normal path of advancement for the technical writer in industry might be from junior writer, to senior writer to publications chief. Usually, the publications chief is subordinate to an individual such as the advertising manager or publicity and public relations director. It is this categorical limitation that tends to curtail the writer's advancement opportunities by preventing his participation in creative planning close to the policy making level.

The economic future of the technical writer seems to be far less limited in the field of technical advertising. In general, the highest paid staff positions in the advertising field fall into this order:

1. copywriter, copy chief
2. artists, art directors
3. account executives, contact men
4. new business men, production people

The following comparative salary figures tend to point up the apparent increase in "appreciative response" to the creative abilities of the writer in advertising:

	Average Maximum in Industry
Jr. Technical writer	$ 6,500
Sr. Technical writer	8,500
Technical editor	9,000
Publications chief	10,000
Average maximum in advertising (medium sized agency, $6 to $12 million dollar billings)	
Copy writer, 2-5 yrs. exp.	$ 7,500
Copy writer, 5-10 yrs. exp.	10,000
Copy writer, over 10 yrs. exp.	25,000
Copy chief	40,000

The picture presented to the technical writer in this growing field of technical advertising seems a very bright one. Perhaps the greatest single advantage for the technical writer in advertising is the opportunity presented to him for acquiring experience at many varied creative tasks. Such experience tends to equip the writer for future advancement to policy-making executive positions.

Positions Available

ENGINEER-WRITER — Require Engineering or Science degree or equivalent and a minimum of two years' technical writing and editing experience. Write Mr. Erling Mostue, Sylvania Electric Products, Inc., 100 First Avenue, Waltham, Massachusetts, or phone TWinbrook 3-9200.

TECHNICAL WRITER — New opportunity in the peacetime atomic applications field. Knowledge of electromechanical equipment and previous writing experience desired — Salary commensurate with experience. Send resume listing experience and salary desired to: Kenneth G. Tong, Chief, Technical Publications — High Voltage Engineering Corporation, Burlington, Massachusetts.

MELPAR, WATERTOWN has an opening for a technical writer with experience in writing technical manuals, progress reports, brochures and final reports. Background in electronics essential. Contact Personnel Department, Melpar, Inc., 11 Galen Street, Watertown, Mass.

TECHNICAL WRITERS — Rewarding opportunities, periodic increases, and excellent retirement plan for experienced technical writers. Suburban housing facilities, schools, churches, and post privileges available. Send Standard Form 57 (obtain at U. S. Post Office) to Commanding Officer, Chemical Corps Engineering Command, Army Chemical Center, Maryland.

A Jargon For Technical Writers

By
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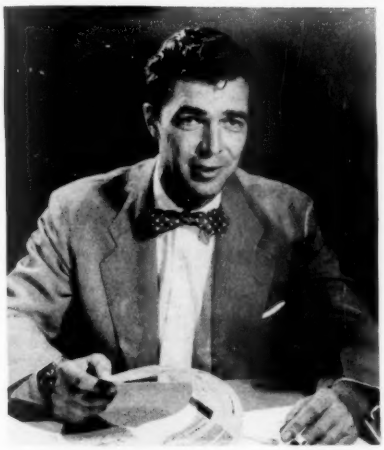
Amherst, Mass.



So many writers and educators have ridiculed jargon for so long a period that questioning their tenets now amounts to heresy. Recent research in linguistics, however, suggests that perhaps some of the problems of technical communication may be alleviated by the creation of a new jargon for scientific writers.

Most writers today still follow the teachings of Quiller-Couch, who was among the first to deplore the use of a technical or secret vocabulary in communications. As Professor of English Literature at Cambridge, he felt free to apply the Old Frisian word "jargon" (for chattering) to such usage. I find it in my heart to defend his right to jargonize in applying terms from his discipline to subjects within the scope of that discipline. (I doubt if it be in his heart, however, to condone my using his noun as a verb.) Indeed, the most defensible area of jargon lies in the application of the exact terms of a subject to that subject. Perhaps that is why he didn't use "babel" and I "babelize." Those words would have communicated to more people, but not with the exactness Quiller-Couch desired.

Contemporary anthropologists, however, are insisting that meaning is pragmatic and is derived wholly from experience. This leaves me a bit conflicted. (If I said "shook," I wouldn't be using jargon, nor would my slang be communicating with any exactness.) Defending the honor, purity, and chastity of a dead language is one thing, but, when the language is a lively and demonstrable bastard, I have the same paternal opportunities as any other man. As a member of an English Department I must defend some standards, but even Kittredge's later works applauded the hybrid vigor of borrowings. ("Words and Their Ways in English Speech," Macmillan).

Lest Kittredge and I seem complete libertines, however, let me quote from part of that essay. "The sole criterion of choice consists in the appropriateness of one's language to the subject or the occasion." Armed with that Olympian statement, I think I can defend the current use of some areas of jargon by technical writers.

EXACTNESS AND BREVITY

To isolate the battlefield, let me define those areas. I hold no brief for padding, proliferation, or deathless prose. I'll fight only for exactness. To me, good copy is copy that reads like a poker hand, and if I have to fill it from the inside with cant and coinages, I shall do so. So, I think, will any technical writer who has ever used "sub-miniaturize."

I'll fight for brevity; so will any Technical Information Division which has ever hired a consultant to discuss "short talk." Yet that very phrase is jargon in our trade.

I'll defend to the death my right to discuss things electrical in terms electrical. Only then am I sure my language is appropriate to the subject.

Armed with Kittredge's quotation, I'll use any language appropriate to the occasion — which I assume means level of usage. If the topic is complex and the assumed audience enlightened, no literary minuet is necessary. The exact words, the cant words of the trade, the jargon if you will, communicate. If the audience is bench-level, so will be my prose.

Examine a few examples of bench-level cant and coinages. Choose something alliterative like the words "drag," "drogue," and "drugg." To a midshipman, an aviator, and a whaler, those words have exact pragmatic meanings. When they are appropriate to the occasion a writer should use them. It is his function to communicate to an immediate audience not a succeeding generation. Posterity can turn to historians; the contractor paying a technical writer wants copy with present applicability.

What is an appropriate form and level for a maintenance manual aimed at half-trained, lower ratings? Certainly not the precious abstractions of a Picasso montage any more than something following the formalized rules of classic art. Why not glue on sand and broken glass? Why not paint both sides of a picture to see it whole? A scientific writer is not bound by academic rules; he is a craftsman with Platonic pur-

pose; his work is utilitarian. With no obligation to abstract or ornament, he can attach hand-holds and eye-stops wherever there is need. These stops and holds can come from any level or medium. What, in a utilitarian sense, was wrong with that memorable sentence from a North American Aviation training manual, "Arctic temperatures can freeze the nuts off a jeep."

Scientific writers from Aristotle to Korzybski have flailed at the problem of exact definition. The success of their attempts has varied directly with their ability to communicate a schema understandable to the lowest intellectual denominator. The botanist Linnaeus was thus successful. His natural classification system could be used by anyone who could count. The plant world, to Linnaeus, was divided into twenty-four classes and sixty-seven orders. This species and genera division was used by garden-club members the world over. They simply counted first the stamens and then the pistils. Of course the whole thing was jargon, but, because everyone understood it, it communicated across the entire range of usage.

There are other examples of theoretical schema immediately apparent to any student of scientific history. All are jargon, but the simplest ones, like the atomic theory, permit a writer to say what he wants without defining what he is not saying. In other words, a game can start as soon as everyone knows the rules. Poker is a game with nice mathematical rules and fairly predictable probability when a nine is a nine and a three is a three. Make those nines and threes wild, however, and you are changing the rules. It is the confusion resulting from the change that makes men drop out, not their allegations that such a game is not worth playing.

RULES NEEDED FOR JARGON

It would seem then that a set of rules — jargon, if you will — understandable to the lowest intellectual denominator would be a boon to a scientific writer. That such rules have not been written is perhaps because semanticists have over-complicated the very problem I am now over-simplifying. Until such rules are written, however, the technical writer must grope for the language appropriate to the subject and the occasion, or, to continue the metaphor, he must change the wild cards until he finds a combination which will permit a maximum number of players to compete.

Current academic developments indicate a preoccupation with inter-disciplinary approaches to "general science." Among these developments has been the establishment of departments and even divisions in applied communications. The jargon of these departments is already private and esoteric, but so was that of Linnaeus at its inception. Anyway, the problems of scientific writing are at least being redefined. It is conceivable that a new set of rules as simple and as popular as that of Linnaeus will result. In that event, the present technical babel will cease, and a new jargon will emerge triumphant.

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The Technical Rapport

By
John Fallon, Member STW
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Sanders Associates
Nashua, N. H.

The smoothly running engineering program is like a well designed machine. In its simplest form it has two inputs — Thought and Experimentation — and two outputs — Product and Explanation. All four elements must be carefully coordinated if the machine is to continue its smooth performance.

The sad fact is that few engineering programs run at top efficiency. One of the reasons for this is that the engineer who does the job and the technical writer who chronicles it, seldom work together in perfect harmony. The engineer might know his formulas inside out; the writer might be as articulate as Emerson. But, in the common ground of communication where the two must mesh like finely tooled gears, one seldom takes the trouble to adjust himself to the tolerances of the other.

Sometimes this is a result of obvious ineptitude on the part of one or both parties, in which case the solution is simple: get someone who can do the job. Sometimes an unresolvable personality conflict will dictate a reassignment of one of the pair. But in the vast majority of cases, professional compatibility between engineer and technical writer can be greatly improved simply by following a few fundamental principles of courtesy, consideration and ordinary common sense.

This article presents, as comments from both members of a typical engineer-technical writer team, the most frequently voiced of these principles. The "typical" team in this case is one in which the technical writer does more than just write. He is an administrative assistant to the project engineer, responsible for fulfilling, or having fulfilled, all the written requirements of a contract. This, of course, is not always the case. Responsibilities vary from firm to firm, from individual to individual. But even the engineer who writes his own reports must have them edited and published; even the technical writer who specializes in preparing handbooks or specifications or parts lists must solicit his information and have it checked. Engineering and technical writing are today so closely interdependent that a professional rapport between engineer and technical writer is vitally necessary to the efficiency of any engineering program.

THE ENGINEER'S COMMENTS

It is my understanding that you know enough about engineering to absorb what is properly explained, enough about writing to transcribe it clearly, enough about the graphic arts to insure an attractive and economical product, and enough about publication standards to guarantee acceptance by the customer. If you are deficient in any of these areas — I realize full well that seasoned technical writers are hard to come by these days — I would rather you tell me in the beginning so I can tailor my talking accordingly.

In spite of your title, I expect you to do a lot more than just transcribe data. As far as I'm concerned, you are in complete charge of all the contract's written requirements: reports, handbooks, specifications, test procedures, parts lists, the whole works. To do your job thoroughly you should examine the contract and pertinent specifications, assign due-dates, order the necessary forms, prescribe contents, determine format, schedule photos, specify illustrations, supervise reproduction, insure accuracy and authenticity, and even check on delivery. I will help you all I can. Just tell me what you need.

Regardless of how well you might organize your work, you have to carry it out continually and conscientiously if it is to be of any real value. When changes occur in your original plans, keep me informed. When you want me to collect some data or prepare a draft, let me know early enough so I can allot plenty of time in my schedule. A progress chart for my wall or a periodic reminder of what's coming up might help us both a great deal. You make it; I'll abide by it.

To avoid the irksome and inefficient last-minute rush, drop around occasionally to see what's going on. It's not fair to either of us if you expect to compile and publish the work for an entire reporting interval during the all-too-brief period between the interval's end and the report's delivery date. If you want monthly or even weekly memos on what has been done, I'll be glad to cooperate.

When we get together to go over a rough draft or to bring you up-to-date on developments, try to have your questions ready before-hand. This interlude of brain-picking is not especially pleasant for either of us: I would rather be engineering; you would prefer to be writing. But it *is* important, and one way to minimize the ordeal without impairing efficiency is for you to think things out before we start. Read over the contract and the proposal; query the men on the bench; learn the project in general terms before you come to me for the fine points.

Please don't misinterpret this. I'm not all facts and figures. Comes the coffee-break, and your solution to the babysitting problem becomes just as important to me as the troublesome gear ratio that's got me stumped. But we *are* working on a tight schedule, and getting out a good report on time is as important to me as it is to you.

One fact that doesn't make things easier for either of us is that information is not always available when it is needed. Almost invariably something happens just prior to publication that should go into a report: an experiment is concluded; a problem is solved; a decision is reached. I'll do my best to minimize this day-before-due-date urgency, but you might as well accept the inevitable and anticipate it. Leave room for last-minute insertions. Decide beforehand where added sections can go. Make up your Table of Contents and List of Illustrations only after the report is irrevocably final.

When you bring your copy to me for review, have it double- or triple-spaced so I can insert changes. And present your final draft so it resembles as closely as possible the finished product. Show me completed drawings and glossy photographic prints of the illustrations, all appropriately titled. Pencil your cover and title page exactly as they are to be reproduced. And if a page is cluttered with corrections, have it retyped.

Offhand the most effective way I can think of to transform me from a cooperative colleague into a veritable Captain Bligh is to lose part of a report. If you don't make carbons, this can happen very easily. After you've made your carbons, keep them all up to date. When you change your original, change each copy as well. Then, if your original is lost, neither of us is any the worse off.

Admittedly you can write better than I. In fact, I sometimes marvel at your ability to understand and transcribe my hieroglyphics. But on occasion these hieroglyphics are intentional. They are specialized language that I know will convey my thoughts unerringly to the customer. If you aren't sure of the meaning of a word or phrase, check with me before you change it. And on the same subject, try to leave a little of me in the report. Cull my work, but don't kill it. This might be less sense than sentiment, but I sometimes turn what seems to me a fair-to-middling phrase. If it doesn't obscure the thought, I'd like to see it left in.

Probably no factor is more influential in our relationship than our attitude toward each other. Certainly you can't work efficiently with a scientific snob. I, on the other hand, find it just as difficult to work when I'm looked upon as a monosyllabic moron. I'm sure we agree pretty well on this point: we should respect one another's abilities while accepting without disdain our respective limitations. Each of us should have his own special province where visiting is welcome but trespassing forbidden.

THE TECHNICAL WRITER'S COMMENTS

If I ask a lot of questions, remember that your project is not the only one I must become intimately acquainted with. For my part, I'll try to ask questions only once; for yours, just remember that the more questions I ask in the beginning, the fewer corrections you'll have to make on this report and the less explaining you'll have to do on later ones.

While my services might range all the way from preparation to proofreading, they do have a limit. When you're in a rush to run off a critical experiment, I'll be glad to help out by punching a stop watch or recording data, but this is not part of my job. When you start needing this kind of assistance regularly, it's time to hire more help.

Ideally I should start work on a project even before we are awarded the contract. Consider this fact and you'll see why: under the terms of a contract, our company agrees to prepare, publish and deliver certain items for a specified sum. Since a number of these items will require my services, which is the logical procedure: to ask me how quickly and economically I think I can do the job, then commit ourselves accordingly; or specify a sum and instruct me to adhere to it?

A lot of factors have to be considered in making an intelligent estimate: program complexity; prior familiarity with the project; previous commitments; specification requirements. In many cases I am the only one in a position to weigh these factors properly, and it's to the company's advantage as well as my own if we get together on these matters at the very beginning.

If I am to write an intelligent and comprehensive report, I must have a complete picture of the program. So don't keep me in the dark. Give me free access to all the files. Route to me any memos you issue and advise me of any decisions you make which might conceivably affect the tone or content of reports. And when you're having meetings, give some thought to including me in.

Any deadline I give you is a carefully calculated estimate. When a contract calls for delivery of a report by a certain time, I must investigate work loads in the Art, Photo, and Printing Departments, consider the speed and accuracy of available typists, see if we have on hand all the paper and binding materials we need, and predict the innumerable problems that might arise between conception and completion of the report. If

you're late with your draft or too busy to review the finished product, or if you insist upon squeezing in data on last-minute developments, we're bound to run into trouble.

Responsibility without authority is like an engineer without a technical writer: both are necessary to do a complete job. So if you want me to get some data from one of your assistants, call him up and tell him I'm coming. If it's essential that we get our report published and sent on its way by tomorrow morning, authorize overtime.

Reports cost money. They can cost a great deal of money. If funds are tight, let's start off on the right foot by telling me how much money I have to work with. I shall always strive for a presentable compromise between promptness and economy, but bear in mind that the difference between an adequate and an excellent report is often only a matter of retouching a few photographs or including one or two extra drawings. Appearance is vitally important when you consider that reports are frequently the only tangible return a customer gets on his investment.

When I make a change in your rough draft, I'm honestly trying to improve its readability. When I eliminate one of your pet words or phrases in the process, it's probably because I feel your choice is not sufficiently clear or descriptive. Style is a nebulous thing. Preferences differ from person to person. But clarity, conciseness and completeness are my tools in trade, so you be the judge of content and I, subject to my Editor's approval, will determine the presentation.

Granted the complexity of a program will determine the number of people who must approve a report prior to its publication, but try to keep this number at a minimum. Where the program has several phases, each will be treated individually in the report so the respective Engineer in charge can review his section quickly and conveniently before approval of the overall report by you. But everyone who reads the unpublished draft after you is almost certain to make some alterations. Unless you have plenty of time and unlimited funds, it's better to pipeline reports directly from you, via me, to publishing.

This matter of attitude is important to me too. Our relationship will be most productive if based on a mutual respect. Without me to chronicle your work, we cannot fulfill our contractual obligation; without your work to write about, I'm out of a job. There can be no disdain for one another's inadequacies. You cannot write a report as well as I, nor can you publish it efficiently. I, on the other hand, cannot design an equipment or administrate its development. But together, pooling our respective talents, we can do a complete job with apology to no one.

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Chapter News

Fort Wayne

The need for ingenuity in technical handbooks was the subject of the talk presented by John Doss, Publications Specialist from Brookley Air Force Base, Alabama, at the November meeting of the Fort Wayne Chapter. Mr. Doss, who must check the quality of all handbooks delivered to the Mobile Air Materiel Command, felt that strict interpretation of specifications produced work of minimum quality standards. Through ingenuity he hoped to raise these standards.

He stressed that specifications". . . are developed for and intended as nominal standards for the composition, inspection, and acceptance of handbooks." But the book must explain an equipment in the best possible way. The specifications are merely a guide. Only the manufacturer knows what the equipment is and how it is best explained. Specifications can generalize about the over-all approach to effective handbooks. The nominal standards present the minimum requirements. The writer must determine the maximum standards that might be attained.

Handbooks must be technically correct and adequate. These factors, too, are obvious only to the manufacturer of an equipment. The Air Force Quality Control Representatives can not determine these factors. Thus the writer's responsibility is to see that no ambiguities or misinterpretations can arise. Mr. Doss continued, "It is not enough that the right way to operate an equipment be explained. Whenever a wrong but easier way is apparent, the instructions should explain why the difficult way is required." Such precautions, such foresight, may save a life.

A handbook has two aspects: its technical content and its format. Both require the writer's innovation. Technical accuracy leads to the proper operation and maintenance of an equipment. Format aids in making instructions more effective. "When a cartoon can make an important point, we want it," said Mr. Doss. "But cartoons that make a useless point are unnecessary."

Ingenuity, innovation, imagination — these are the qualities the Air Force hopes to see in handbooks. "Your willingness to invent will have a direct bearing upon the effectiveness of Air Force weapons," he concluded.

During the January 22 meeting held at the Purdue University Extension Center, John Trier, president of Graphic Reproduction and Supply, Inc., led a discussion of the services and supplies available to technical writers. A short business meeting preceded the discussion by Mr. Trier and representatives of a duplicating process supply firm.

The discussion was graphically illustrated with samples of the materials used in preparing publications. Each of these materials was one of the tools of the technical writing profession. Paper, ink, type, and photographic reproduction often make a publication look good or bad, even if we don't know exactly why. These supplies must be used to their best advantage before quality becomes apparent. The speakers showed how these materials are most effectively used to produce better publications.

A. L. Brenneman, president of the Fort Wayne Chapter, announced that the following members have accepted committee positions:

John Wittgenfeld, Chairman, Readability
Richard Butler, Chairman, Membership
Walter Slater, Program
Edmund Pierce, Public Relations

Mr. Brenneman stated that committees are the basic functioning units of the chapter. As each committee becomes more effective, so does the chapter. Since none of the committees are completely staffed, a form was attached to the latest Chapter Bulletin requesting Chapter members to indicate their availability for committee work and their preference for committee.

Mohawk

At the January meeting of the Mohawk Chapter the following officers were installed:

President — Steven Smith, Alco Products, Inc., vice president — Robert A. Sencer, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, secretary-treasurer—Miss Berta Green.

In addition several other positions were filled. These were: chairman of program committee — John Raffone, Chairman of membership committee — Carl Caruso, publicity — Miss Berta Green and Matthew Marchione, correspondent — James Russell.

It was decided that five regular meetings a year would be held.

R. A. Sencer gave an interesting report on the status of the merger of STW and TWE. He included an outline of the basic differences between the two and how the differences were resolved to clear the way for the merger. He also gave a report on the activities of the National Publications Committee.

Other subjects were discussed included: types of topics which would be most interesting for future meetings; whether or not the public should be invited to hear some of the future speakers; communications between national headquarters and the chapter; chapter membership; effective publicity; and the desirability of a news letter-type publication from national headquarters.

Albuquerque

Dr. Richard K. Moore, Chief of the Electrical Engineering Department at the University of New Mexico, spoke on "An Engineer Looks at Today's Report Writing" during the January meeting of the Albuquerque Chapter. Dr. Moore stated that the two fundamental requirements technical report writing must meet are first, easy assimilation by the reader, and second, a streamlined system for gathering information.

In order to give the reader maximum information with a minimum number of words, an engineering report should be written like a news story. The answers to the five W's should be given in the introductory paragraph where applicable, so that the busy scientist does not have to plough through the whole report.

Other important means of facilitating assimilation of technical information are illustrations (if provided with proper captions), the abstract, a proper title and an informative introduction. The abstract should contain in some detail what was done, what reasoning was employed, by what methods it was accomplished, and what results were obtained. Dr. Moore emphasized that the answers must be given in qualitative terms. The introduction, like the abstract, should give a summary of the complete report, but in greater detail. It should include such illustrative devices as summary graphs and summary equations with a brief interpretation of each. If it is desired to give background information, such as the historical development of a technical discovery, it should be put in an appendix for those readers who wish to study a particular subject in more detail.

During the second part of the talk, methods were discussed for improved coordination between organizations charged with the collection and dissemination of technical information. It was pointed out that a great deal of valuable engineering effort is virtually lost because the findings of the engineers or scientists are not properly recorded, classified or disseminated. Duplication of engineering effort is therefore a frequent occurrence. It was recommended that first, the Dewey Decimal System be adapted, second, more specific categories within the vast body of scientific and technical information be introduced, and third, library personnel should have a better technical background, enabling them to properly classify the multitude of technical papers into their respective categories. The need for properly trained information theorists was stressed.

Boston

Recounting opportunities in technical advertising — even treading boldly in the usually hush-hush area of salary levels — George F. Mackenzie, vice president of Technical Marketing Associates, Concord, Mass., and a member of the Boston Chapter, STW, addressed the November meeting of the Chapter at the Museum of Science. Chapter President John V. E. Hansen presided. Mrs. Jill Parks and Miss Edith Klatskin added a touch of charm to the chore of lapel-tag-identifying of members and guests. Anthony J. Milici dispensed refreshments.

According to Mr. MacKenzie, among the areas currently afflicted with serious technical writing voids are the fields of technical marketing research, technical publicity and public relations, technical product design and development, instructional literature, advertising management and technical sales promotion. These activities need the experience and creative ability of the technical writer in its many facets. Mr. MacKenzie's talk appears elsewhere in this issue.

Volta Torrey, director of television for Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was guest speaker at the January dinner meeting of the Chapter at Patten's Restaurant in Boston. His topic was "Science on T.V."

Excerpts from Mr. Torrey's talk:

Television can be compared with the original medium of mass communication in pre-literate society — making one's self visible and audible to a throng of people.

The handicaps of presenting science subjects "live" on television are threefold:

(1) Television audiences are not prepared to accept educational shows.

(2) Such presentations lack feedback from the audience.

(3) The speaker has very limited control of the impression that the audience gets of him since the cameramen and technicians are really in charge.

The handicaps are partially overcome by the filming of programs to permit editing, "proof-reading", revising, etc. Film presentations, however, put television in a category with other media that "distribute frozen messages" such as printing, movies, and phonograph recordings. If education television does not become more than just a vehicle for the transmission of films, one of its greatest advantages is lost.

The college still has classrooms, although most of what professors tell students is in the library. Students still come to Boston from all parts of the country simply to go to school, although they could stay home and take correspondence courses much more cheaply. Statesmen fly around the world simply to see each other when it's so easy to exchange photographs, letters, films, and recordings. Correspondingly, the scientist and teacher with a message to deliver will find that television is the best means when the present handicaps are corrected.

Television is the nearest modern method to the oldest and best method of communicating. There is no limit to the number of students who can be accommodated in a television classroom. If it can be made an educational medium as well as a vaudeville show, a good many of the problems of science today will quickly disappear.

Technical writers can help not only scientists but also communicators to overcome the difficulties of television education that are simply the result of inexperience, of insufficient funds, and of insufficient appreciation of the peculiarities of television as a medium of mass communications.

Philadelphia

The Philadelphia Chapter of the Society of Technical Writers met on February 6th to hold first nomination of officers for 1957. At a well attended meeting called by acting president Paul R. Reed, many approaches were discussed for knitting the Chapter into a smoothly working organization for the benefit of both technical writers and industry in the Delaware Valley. The Delaware Valley was described as the fastest-growing industrial area in the United States today, offering untold opportunities to highly technical manufacturing industries, research and development centers and laboratories.

General Electric, Westinghouse, Budd, Hercules and many other national companies are expanding their activities in the Valley, promising a golden future for the area's technical writers in a variety of writing fields. Representatives of many of the manufacturing firms of the area were present at the meeting, both as observers and as members. All pledged to assist in guidance and placement services to the best of their ability.

Cincinnati

From a nucleus of STW members at the Crosley Division of AVCO Mfg. Corp. and the Aircraft Gas Turbine and Aircraft Nuclear Propulsion departments of General Electric Co. in Cincinnati, Ohio, a mushroom-shaped cloud is slowly but surely rising, evidencing near nuclear activity. In only three meetings, more than 40 people who are eligible for membership have been reached, Twenty applications have already been received at national headquarters from this group.

Although application for charter is high on the priority list of things for this group to accomplish, they have not waited for national sanction before undertaking projects for the advancement of the profession. Several committees have been formed, including one on education which is planning an intensive drive to encourage more academic and laboratory courses in technical writing in the colleges and universities within one hundred miles of Cincinnati.

(Editor's Note: A petition for official recognition of a Cincinnati Chapter has been received and approved by National Headquarters, STW.)

Connecticut

Robert Bruce, Publications Administrator of the General Engineering Laboratory, American Machine & Foundry Company, addressed the January 15 meeting of the Connecticut Chapter at the Savoy Restaurant in Hamden. Nearly forty members and guests attending the meeting. Mr. Bruce discussed the "Preparation of Military Manuals." He covered all phases of the subject from the basic approach to the manual to the final publication.

At the February 14 meeting. Norman S. Fenichel, Editorial Services Director, The Charles Brunelle Company, spoke on "Popularizing Technical Information." He explained the problems encountered by the advertising man and journal writer in adapting technical reports, specifications, etc., for publication aimed both at the general public and at other interested technical personnel.

A panel discussion on "The Training of Technical Writers" is scheduled for the March 26 meeting. Joseph Rodek of American Machine & Foundry Company will be chairman. Panel members will be Robert Hamlett of Sperry Gyroscope, Jack Denlin of Burns and Row, and Sherwood Martin of Hamilton Standard.

New York

A panel discussion on "Estimating Handbook Costs" was held at the December meeting of the New York City Chapter. Joe Duffy of McGraw-Hill Book Co. was moderator. J. Adinaro of Cushing and Nevelle and Hal Adler of Volt-Technical were panel members. The panel discussion was preceded by a report on the status of the STW-TWE merger.

Dean I. Sweet of Pratt Institute spoke at the January 18 meeting on "The Technical Writer as a Professional." This meeting was held at the Columbia University Faculty Men's Club.

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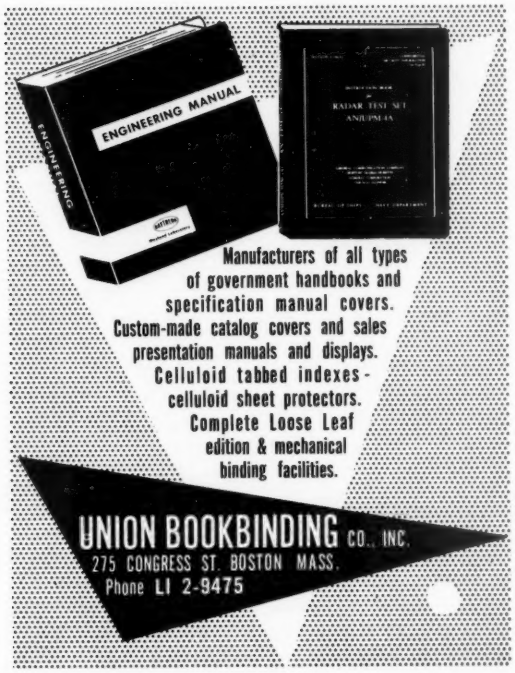
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STW-TWE-TPS MERGER DISCUSSED

A three-way merger of the Society of Technical Writers, the Association of Technical Writers and Editors, and the Technical Publishing Society is now expected to occur in the near future. In these latest plans, TPS will join the already agreed-upon merger of STW and TWE. Although this may delay the merger beyond the original schedule, it is believed that the delay will be negligible in comparison to the values to be gained from the resultant merger.

The practicability of this new merger was discussed at a meeting of officers of the three organizations held at the Hotel Statler in New York on December 27, 1956. Representatives at this meeting were: Robert K. Shnitzler, president STW; Richard Frehsee, president TWE; Miss Elsie Ray, secretary TWE; Edward Stearn, president TPS; Carl M. Johnson, first vice president TPS; and William E. Welch, secretary-treasurer TPS.

At the meeting it was agreed that the philosophies of the three organizations were compatible and that further steps should be taken to speed up the merger of the three into one national organization. In line with this policy, the TPS representatives agreed to have their Board of Directors review the existing proposed joint STW-TWE constitution. This will permit TPS to determine immediately which areas of this constitution are agreeable to them. Stress may then be placed upon the relatively few differences in philosophy and a compromise may more readily be reached among the three groups.

Joint committees to carry on merger plans are now being appointed. They are expected to begin functioning immediately. The present joint STW-TWE Constitution Committee consists of Ronald D. Eames, STW; Charles Hammond, STW; Mrs. Jeanne B. North, TWE; and Ernst M. Cohn, TWE.

NOTE

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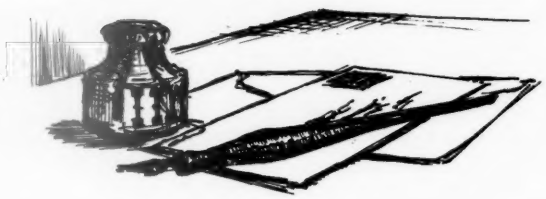

LETTERS FROM READERS

To the Editor:

As a reader of the REVIEW, I applaud the recent trend of our magazine toward concreteness, coming to grips with specific problems and techniques of our craft. In line with the trend, these comments concerning an admirable article and book review in the Fall issue, are offered for what they are worth.

SHORT VS. LONG SENTENCES

Mr. Augustus says in his lucid lead article, "Simplicity in Technical Writing," that short sentences are annoying and that long sentences are sometimes hard to understand. I agree heartily that long sentences are sometimes hard to understand. However, I do not accept without further qualification that short sentences are annoying. In an instruction manual, a series of staccato sentences as step-by-step instructions can be a string of pearls.

At the risk of dating myself, I submit a fine example of technical writing that was more annoying for the tune than the lyrics.

1. Push the little valve down
2. The music goes round and round
3. It comes out here.

Now this could have been stated: "Pressure of the third digit on the activator depresses valve A, admitting air under pressure, which, in turn, is emitted from the bell of the instrument causing serial sound waves or vibrations and a distinct audio sensation which may or may not be music, depending on the skill of the operator, although it can not be denied that the receptor, too, introduces a subjective element bearing on the end result."

This type of writing is not the simplicity Mr. Augustus is talking about, and it could be really annoying to someone trying to operate or to fix something.

An old colleague of mine, 22 years a teacher of journalism in Missouri high schools, was well supplied with homely aphorisms relating to the craft. He used to say, "If anyone handed me a paper with a sentence of over 27 words, I'd mark him off for it."

I do not know where my friend came up with his magic number for this golden rule-of-thumb. It was way before Rudolph Flesch appeared on the scene. Nevertheless, the old codger doggedly insisted that this was the number of words the average secondary school student could digest in one lump.

"Corney," I thought, "real cracker-barrel stuff," and yet even now, writing technical copy, I find myself breaking up sentences that roll out any longer.

But why not? Granting the validity of 22 years of experience, what's sauce for the gosling should be sauce for the gander. Why not feed sentences of 27 words or less to the PhD's too?

The exception to this rule is in listing items considered more convenient to include in text than to list in a table. The opening line of the Walrus's soliloquy in "Alice in Wonderland" is a case in point. The sentence is only 24 words long, but still could be understood by a child if words were added to the list of "shoes, ships, sealing wax, cabbages and kings."

On the other hand, if the sentence structure is involved, say by as much as an inverted clause, it is probably better to shorten the sentence.

(Please do not count the words in any sentence above. It happens that this writer is an admirer of the work of Nobel prize-winner William Faulkner, all-time record holder for nonstop sentence marathons. Faulkner's sentences are challenging and create mood. They are not, however, models for technical writing.)

COMPOUND VS. COMPLEX SENTENCES

Mr. Augustus's quarrel, I feel, should not be with compound sentences *per se* but with unbalanced compound sentences. If two ideas are equal and connected, they can be effective if *stated in the same form* and connected by a conjunction. Example: "Change the desiccant but do not replace the container." Elliptical construction should be avoided. It is better to repeat precisely the wording of the primary clause as an aid to comprehension. The danger flag goes up with complex sentences which are too often just what the word "complex" implies. However, there can be no blanket rule covering the choice of sentence structure. These are matters of editorial judgement which should be influenced by the nature of the job.

Just one more word of warning by way of comment. We are too often apt to err on the side of maturity and so to become stuffy. Not to bite the hand that feeds us, it is a well known, if regrettable fact that there are many learned analphabets in the engineering and scientific professions. Selfishly, I, for one, am glad of it because this is a main reason why some of us are employed. But we must remember that *they* are number boys, and that *we* are word boys. I have found scientists as a class to be simple men, fond of simple speech* (and little of that — even the few who can give me cards and spades at my own game). Therefore I think it behooves us to try for simple, direct statement, and we should not pad.

** The exception is the neophyte report writer's misguided attempt to impress the boss.*

I once had an employer, the principal of a small advertising agency, whose literary criticism of my copy consisted of two slogans: "Style this up" and "Garbage that." I don't think we should "style up" technical copy but I do think we should try to garbage all we can.

SCIENTIST VS. WRITER

Mr. C. Baker, as quoted in the review of his book "Technical Publications", certainly puts first things first when he says a technical writer should be technical first and writer second. But I think the point can be overstressed. It is only restating an axiom of good writing in any field: The writer should know his subject. But then he must write it. If he knows his subject cold it will make the writing easier and more successful. But the writer must still write it and on the success of that effort will depend his ultimate success in this specialized field.

Richard C. Angell, Member STW
Albuquerque, N. Mex.

TECHNICAL WRITERS' INSTITUTE

The fifth annual Technical Writers' Institute will be held at Renesselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York, beginning Monday, June 10, and running through Friday, June 14. Outstanding as an aid to the technical writing profession in industry, the general program will be in charge of Jay R. Gould, Director.

In the past four years 300 representatives of 150 national and international companies have taken advantage of the Writers' Institute. The Institute has been designed for those who supervise technical writing in business, industry, and the professions. It also has had a carryover effect in that a number of companies have based report writing courses on the Writers' Institute curriculum and have called on a number of the regular staff of the Institute for consultation and counseling.

Included in the over-all workshop are sessions on manuals and instruction books, reports, technical promotion, training programs, industrial films, and graphic and illustrative aids. Special laboratory writing sessions put into practice the more general principles learned through lectures and discussion.

In addition to the Rensselaer staff, a special group of lecturers will demonstrate outstanding accomplishments in technical writing. Among them will be Donald D. Starr, Technical Information, Engineering Division, Chrysler Corporation; Charles Troupe, Service Publications, The Glenn L. Martin Company; Donald H. Green, Publications Engineering, Collins Radio Company; Howard J. Constantin, Illustrations for Publication, Sperry Gyroscope Company; Hugh T. Sharp, Assistant Editor, CHEMICAL ENGINEERING magazine; Joseph C. Hoffman, Product Information, Special Defense Projects, General Electric Company; and Frederic C. Regan, Manager of Advertising for Abrasives, Behr-Manning Corporation.

RIDER COLLEGE COURSE

It has recently been announced that Rider College, Trenton, New Jersey, a college of Business Administration and Accounting, is offering a two-credit evening course in technical writing during the Spring evening session. This course, planned especially to aide engineering and office personnel in preparing technical reports and correspondence, is offered as part of a program designed to serve local industry. Further details may be obtained from Rider College.

REPORT WORKSHOP AT PENN STATE

Workshops aimed at providing engineers and scientists with instruction and practice in preparing technical reports will be conducted March 17-29 and Sept. 16-27, 1957, at The Pennsylvania State Univ.

Staff for the Technical Report Writing Seminar will consist of Dr. Dwight E. Gray, program director for government research information, the National Science Foundation; Arthur G. Norris, director of technical information of the Vitro Corporation's engineering division; and Christian K. Arnold, associate professor of engineering research and technical editor of the Ordnance Research Laboratory at Penn State. Evening lectures will be presented by other experts in the field of technical writing.

Emphasis during the seminar will be on the workshop aspect of training, with half of each day devoted to practice, the remainder to lecture and discussion. Topics will include functions and use of illustrative material, nature and function of the technical report, pitfalls in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and editing and illustrating techniques used in technical reports.

TUFTS SUMMER WORKSHOP

A two-week Workshop in Technical Writing with sessions held throughout each day is scheduled for the period July 22 through August 2 at Tufts University. This Summer Course is expected to attract technical writers with some experience as well as the beginners. Registration will be limited to 35. Dormitory accommodations and cafeteria meals will be available.

This course will follow a three-phase pattern. In the forenoon there will be lectures and presentation of a problem. In the afternoon the students will work out the problem and the following morning there will be a critique and discussion of the previous day's studies and work. A valuable feature of this workshop will be the opportunities for people from different areas, industries and companies to exchange ideas. Dr. Paul H. Flint will again be director of this workshop.

For further information, contact Director of Summer School, Ballou Hall, Tufts University, Medford 55, Mass. or write directly to Dr. Flint.

Society of Technical Writers

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